



I. Introduction

A. Purpose

The Office of the Patient Advocate (OPA) is an independent and autonomous office under the Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency. The Office informs consumers about their Health Maintenance Organizations (HMO) rights and responsibilities and helps assure the highest level of customer service at the Department of Managed Health Care's HMO Help Center. The OPA works together with the Department of Managed Health Care to ensure a viable and strong managed health care system so Californians receive quality health care and aggressive disease prevention.

B. Activities

1. The Patient Advocate works to educate consumers about their HMO health care rights and responsibilities, including the need to access early intervention screenings and preventive care that can detect and arrest life-threatening and disabling diseases. The Patient Advocate also works to improve HMO services by using consumer feedback about HMOs to identify potential innovations.
2. The Patient Advocate develops educational and informational guides and resources in multiple languages for consumers that explain consumer rights and responsibilities and inform them of effective ways to exercise their rights to obtain health care services.
3. The Patient Advocate compiles an annual report card on the state's HMOs and medical groups to help consumers make better choices about which plan is best for their individual and family needs.
4. As part of the state's efforts to make sure that every Californian who needs HMO help gets it, the Patient Advocate will assure that services are accessible in multiple languages as well as to those living with disabilities.
5. The HMO Help Center provides help to Californians who can't resolve a problem with their HMO. The OPA helps identify systemic consumer problems being reported at the Help Center as well as throughout the state so the Department can act quickly and efficiently.



II. Program Metrics

In connection with the Performance Improvement Initiative, the Department lists 9 metrics in two major programs:

A. HMO Report Card

1. Number of visits/visitors to website – visitors to the website have been fairly constant over the last three years; visits have increased by 6,000 in 2002/03 and are estimated to decrease by 15,000 in 2003/04.
2. Number of hard copies of report card distributed – the number distributed over the last three years has been constant, averaging slightly more than 100,000 copies.
3. Number of local outlets participating in distribution of report card – in the first year, there was only one local outlet; however, for the last two years, the number has been constant at approximately 1,000.
4. Annual improvement percentage in quality and patient satisfaction scores for quality of care – depicts eight different health plans overall with a slight increase in compliance.
5. Annual improvement percentage in quality and patient satisfaction scores of care provided by HMOs and medical groups – depicts eight different health plans overall with a slight increase in compliance.

B. Consumer Education

1. Number of events conducted annually by OPA and its contractors – the number of events in 2000/01 and 2001/02 were 23 and 48, respectively. The numbers increased dramatically in 2002/03 to 345, and in 2003/04 to more than 400.
2. Number of face-to-face consumer contacts – the numbers were relatively low in 2000/01 and 2001/02, 4,225 and 8,473 (all by OPA); in 2002/03, they increased dramatically when local contractors increased the number of contacts by 15,000 while OPA contacts stayed fairly constant.
3. Number of HMO Guides distributed by county – the number of guides distributed by counties is 334,750.
4. Number of HMO Guides distributed per capita (HMO members) – the guides per capita distributed statewide average 0.02.



III. Benchmarking

There are no standards or benchmarks with other states.

IV. Department Website (<http://www.opa.ca.gov>)

A. Online services offered

OPA's website provides information on the OPA's services and activities; publications such as Quality of Care Report Card, HMO Services in Other Languages, California's HMO Guide, educational materials; event information and resource links to other advocacy groups.